



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wisconsin infantry battalion completes first month of training for Operation Iraqi Freedom

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2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry*

CAMP SHELBY, Miss. — Training in Southern Mississippi for 30 days before they deploy to Southwest Asia next month in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the 600-plus soldiers of the Wisconsin National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry have endured heat, dust, long days, a tropical storm, and the first pangs of separation from families and loved ones.

Fittingly, on July 4th, the unit took pause in its hectic schedule to reflect not only on the patriotic sacrifices of past generations, but also on their previous 30 days of war preparation. Many family members bussed, drove, or flew to Mississippi to spend Independence Day with their soldiers. Here, amid excursions to Biloxi, picnics on post, or dinners at local restaurants, soldiers heard news from home, stole kisses from sweethearts, and generally regaled their visitors with stories from the first few days of training.

Conversations between visiting families and the troops often start with simple things: "How's the food?" "Boy it's hot down here!" "Where do you live?" The answers the soldiers give are generally positive. The food at Camp Shelby has won awards as some of the best in the Army — good deep-fried southern entrees — and a decent selection of healthier food delivered cafeteria-style in the mess hall.

Most soldiers agree the heat is miserable but they also understand they soon will live somewhere much hotter. Kuwait and Iraq regularly reach 120 to 130 degrees in the summer, though without the suffocating Gulf Coast humidity. All but a few of Camp Shelby's barracks are air conditioned, one-story, concrete block buildings in which 15 to 20 soldiers live together in bays of five to 10 beds. While an army bed may not qualify as a luxury, by the end of a hard training day little else matters except for the coolness of an air conditioned room and the fact that each soldier has a place of his own to sleep.

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Other than letters from home, sleep is possibly the most precious commodity to a soldier. Training days begin with physical fitness at 5:30 a.m. and usually end later than 10:00 at night. This means that troops often get less than five hours sleep after cleaning their equipment and taking care of personal hygiene needs.

The battalion began its training just over four weeks ago with Soldier Readiness Processing. This included checking each soldier's financial, legal, and job-specific documents and also certified that soldiers were physically and mentally ready for deployment. Then began a regimen of classes and hands-on training in basic lifesaving skills, unexploded ordnance identification, cultural awareness, communications equipment operations, and chemical and biological hazard survival.

The unit was also issued new gear, including improved protective helmets, individual body armor, rucksacks, and sand-colored boots. New uniforms will arrive soon.

Most recently, the unit completed weapons familiarization and qualification on the M-9 pistol, M-4 carbine, M-249 squad automatic weapon, M-240B machine gun, M-19 automatic grenade launcher, and M-2 .50-caliber machine gun. Weapons training finished with Road March Stress Fire and Reflexive Fire training, designed to increase the soldiers' proficiency by simulating conditions closer to combat than those normally found on a qualification range.

Despite all this activity the old adage, "Hurry up and wait," still applies. Many training events take only a short time to complete, but when more than 600 troops rotate through various training sites, limited transportation and other resources can create backlogs and occasional confusion. It's during this time that soldiers take care of important business: they share stories, tease one another, teach newcomers their jobs, and develop friendships with the men next to them who will be "family" for the twelve months ahead.

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Note to Editors: The Wisconsin Army National Guard's 2nd Battalion, 127th Infantry is headquartered in Appleton with units in Waupun, Ripon, Green Bay, Fond du Lac and Marinette. The battalion was mobilized June 6 and departed Wisconsin June 9 for several months additional training at Camp Shelby, near Hattiesburg, Miss.

The infantry battalion was augmented by soldiers from the Onalaska-based 32nd Engineer Company and from Troop E, 105th Cavalry of Antigo and Merrill.

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